

Findings from the 2020-2022 Funding Cycle Applicant Survey: All 2020 TRP Review Windows (1, 2, 3)

23 December 2020

Executive Summary

982 individuals responded to the Global Fund Applicant Survey in 2020. An overwhelming majority of applicants (nearly 95%) were positive about their overall experience applying for Global Fund financing. This sentiment was strongest among Program Continuation, Tailored for Focused Portfolios, and Tailored for National Strategic Plans (NSPs) applicants, as well as among returning applicants irrespective of application approach.

The vast majority of returning applicants agreed that the funding request submitted in 2020 was simpler to fill in than the one used for the 2017-2019 funding cycle. Returning applicants who submitted tailored requests, in particular, highlighted improved clarity and efficiency in their remarks. These applicants also highlighted the value of their increased familiarity with the process and expressed appreciation for the support they received from the Global Fund Secretariat.

The time necessary to complete the funding request continued to be a challenge, however. Some returning applicants who used tailored approaches were disappointed that these applications did not take significantly less time than that required for the Full Review application submitted for the last funding cycle. In their comments, these applicants highlighted: the extra time necessary to complete templates in the annexes, the level of detail required irrespective of portfolio type, frustrations relating to varying levels of Global Fund Country Team support, and challenges coordinating and achieving an inclusive funding request development process in the context of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Despite challenges, nearly all respondents assessed their overall experience in country dialogue positively—with almost half of them sharing that country dialogue was their favorite part of the entire application process. As a whole, applicants responded consistently 90% positively or higher when asked if they felt free to express their views, if they felt prepared to participate and add value to the discussion, and if those organizing the country dialogue actively reached out to civil society.

Applicants responded most favorably about the use of NSPs in their funding requests, with over 90% responding positively both when asked if the country's NSP was used as a basis to develop the funding request and if the country's NSP was costed and prioritized to the extent that it could be used or quoted in the application. At the same time, survey respondents were satisfied with their funding requests' ability to address health systems challenges and gender- and human rights-related barriers.

Lastly, while applicants expressed that integrated funding requests required more effort, they were appreciative of the level of support received from the Global Fund and Partners. An added bonus, several commented, was that the resulting funding request was more inclusive as a product of the necessary consultations.

Overview of Dataset

The following is a comprehensive analysis of all responses to the Country Dialogue and Funding Request Development Survey (hereafter the “Applicant survey”) across the three 2020 TRP review windows. A total of 982 participants responded to either some or all of the survey questions. As seen in Table 1, the majority of respondents submitted a Full Review funding request.

Table 1. Distribution, Respondents across Application Approaches

Application Approach	Total Respondents (n)
Full Review	581
Tailored for Focused Portfolios	140
Tailored for National Strategic Plans	176
Tailored for Transition	49
Program Continuation	36
TOTAL	982

Table 2 shows that there were notably fewer respondents from Focused portfolio countries than from Core and High-Impact portfolio countries.

Table 2. Distribution, Respondents across Portfolio Type

Portfolio Type	Total Respondents (n)
Core	473
Focused	185
High-Impact	324
TOTAL	982

The distribution of constituencies skewed towards greater government representation, while there were fewer individuals from Faith-Based Organizations (FBO) and Academia, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution, Respondents across Constituency Groups

Constituency Group	Total Respondents (n)
Academia	14
CCM Secretariat	54
Consultant/Technical Assistance Provider	42
FBO	13
Government program, ministry or agency	267
International NGO	73
Key population organization	169
Multi-lateral or bi-lateral agency	126
National NGO or civil society group	160
Other	15
Private sector	28
Unclear	21
TOTAL	982

A regional distribution is shown in Table 4, which shows that the greatest number of respondents came from the Western Africa region.

Table 4. Distribution, Respondents across Global Fund Regions

Global Fund Region	Total Respondents (n)
Central Africa	112
Eastern Europe & Central Asia	78
Latin America & the Caribbean	89
High-Impact Africa 1	61
High-Impact Africa 2	131
High-Impact Asia	123
Middle East & North Africa	61
South East Asia	94
Southern & Eastern Africa	87
Western Africa	146
TOTAL	982

Funding Application Process

Applicants were overwhelmingly positive about their overall experience applying for Global Fund financing, with 94.6% of respondents stating that their experience was good or very good. This positive sentiment was even stronger among **returning applicants**, whose proportion of positive responses was on average five points higher than among new applicants (96.1% versus 91.4%).

Across the different application types, respondents were 90% positive or higher about their overall experience applying for funding in 2020. This was notably the case for **Program Continuation** (100%), **Tailored for Focused Portfolios** (97.2%), and **Tailored for NSPs** (94.2%) applicants.

On the whole, **returning applicants** were largely positive about their 2020 application being simpler to fill in than the one submitted for the last funding cycle (84.0%). At the same time, returning applicants were not equally in agreement when asked if the funding request submitted this year took less time to develop than the one for the last cycle (61.9%). While the greatest level of disagreement was expressed among returning applicants who submitted a Full Review funding request in 2020 (55.4% positive), some of those who applied using a tailored application approach highlighted that the analysis involved was equally time-consuming:

“Even though this was a program continuation with supposedly shorter sections and pages, the analysis required to complete the templates was not significantly less than that required for a full review.”

Though still largely positive, returning applicants who used the **Tailored for Focused Portfolios** approach identified room for growth in their comments, with some flagging that the level of detail required by the Global Fund Secretariat may not have been appropriate given the portfolio type:

“Although I understand the need for intensive screening of applicants and applications, I think the level of detail required is too much. Many details can be worked out in the grant making phase, and even then, will be subject to change due to contextual changes in the country.”

While there were relatively fewer respondents who used the **Tailored for Transition** application approach, all of these respondents (100%) found the application to be simpler to fill in than the one used during the last funding cycle. Furthermore, 75% of returning applicants who used the Tailored for Transition approach reported that the 2020-2022 application took less time to develop than the one used for the 2017-2019 funding cycle.

In their written responses, returning applicants who submitted a Tailored for Transition funding request referred to the benefits of being able to rely on learnings from their previous experiences applying for funding. Others praised the strong communication and support received from the Global Fund Secretariat, which helped to make the process less complicated:

“The funding process is clear and more efficient now that we have been involved in another grant, as we know more about it, which has made it easier to prepare.”

“A new virtual methodology was created that facilitated exchanges between the parties. The instructions were precise, and the Portfolio Manager was always on hand.”

Finally, 89.7% of all respondents who applied using the **Tailored for Transition** approach believed that the time and work necessary to complete the application was appropriate given the available funding. New applicants in particular mentioned that, while the process was complex, the final product was worth the time and resources invested:

“In over 25 years of experience working with aid agencies, this is the most thorough preparatory work I participated in for such a relatively modest amount of funding. It relied on a thorough analysis of the

situation and consultation with all groups. I have been deeply impressed by the quality of the process, and of the resulting product.”

First piloted during the last funding cycle, the **Tailored for NSPs** funding request application approach was more widely rolled-out in 2020. In total, 28 funding requests used this approach. An overwhelming majority of all applicants who used the Tailored for NSPs application (84.3%) believed that the amount of time and work needed to complete a Tailored for NSPs funding request was appropriate given the amount of funding available. After Tailored for Transition, this is the greatest proportion of positive responses to this question across the five application approaches.

Roughly three-quarters of the returning applicants who used the **Tailored for NSPs** approach (74.5%) agreed that the application took less time to develop than the form submitted for the last funding cycle. In their written comments, returning applicants mentioned that the maturity of the NSP was a success factor, as delays in NSP development may cause negative impacts on the amount of time necessary to develop the funding request based on the NSP. Others commented that, while the level of consultation needed to develop a Tailored for NSPs funding request may prolong the process, early engagement from the Global Fund Secretariat made a positive difference:

“I disagree that the application took less time in developing funding application since it needs a lot of consultations from different members to reach on final decision. And I Agree with the statements above in that all levels there was massive cooperation in developing funding application, and this gave me a great experience shared from different participants. Thank you so much!”

“The funding application [...] form was simple; the various sections were laid out well. Support from the Global Fund country team was provided in advance [...], during which preparatory meetings were held involving all stakeholders and guidance was provided on the option of a funding application based on the national strategic plans. The dialogue between the country team and the CCM was maintained throughout the entire process of developing the joint national funding application for TB/HIV.”

Furthermore, 83.7% of new applicants found the **Tailored for NSPs** approach to be straightforward. In their comments, new applicants emphasized the value of strong communication and coordination—including in the form of support from the Global Fund Country Teams—in helping to make the process less complicated, stating:

“Actually Tailored to NSP are first time and need consistency both NSP and this Funding Request proposal but guidance and intense communication [...] CT make clear and easy. Including detailing activity and detailing budget process.”

Returning applicants were more critical of the **Full Review** application, with only 55.4% of them agreeing that it took less time to develop the funding request for the 2020-2022 funding cycle than for the last one. This was the least positive assessment of time required across all five application types. In their comments, returning applicants highlighted either that there was no difference in the amount of time required to develop the funding request for the 2020-2022 funding cycle than for the last one or that it took more time to develop the funding request for this cycle. Respondents raised concerns relating to the amount of coordination necessary to ensure inclusivity of the process and to obtain all necessary data, which—in some cases—was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic:

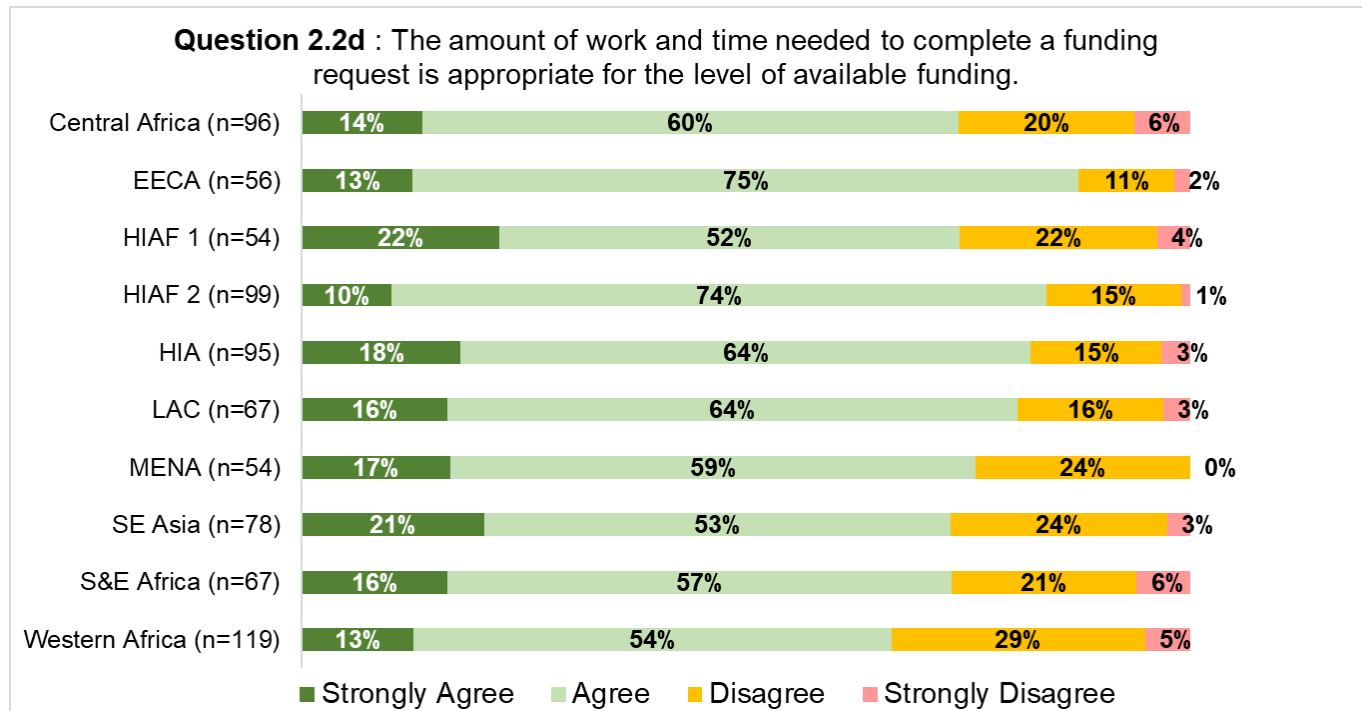
“Relevant information has been added to the new template, which takes longer to fill in. However, the time taken to fill it in depends more on the availability of information and stakeholders' understanding of the content of the sections in the funding request.”

“Developing the request amidst the COVID-19 outbreak made it extremely challenging.”

Despite the higher levels of criticism, 73.6% of **Full Review** applicants nonetheless believed that the time and work needed to complete the funding request were appropriate for the level of funding.

Differing opinions were also evident across the portfolio types, with applicants from **High-Impact** portfolio countries providing the greatest proportion of positive responses about the amount of time and work necessary to develop the funding request given the amount of funding available (80.8%). Furthermore, applicant opinion on this matter varied by region, with Eastern Europe and Central Asia showing the highest level of agreement and Western Africa the lowest, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Applicant Assessment of Work & Time Needed to Complete FR against Available Funding across Global Fund Regions, Percent (n=785)



In their comments, applicants from the entire array of **High-Impact** Global Fund regions highlighted the benefits of consistent support from the Global Fund Country Teams, stating that this on-going support made timelines more manageable:

“The time for developing funding application is reasonable for us from the country dialogues till submission of funding request. The GF country team always help/assist the country in this process.”

Among High-Impact applicants, the greatest proportion of positive responses about the amount of work and time needed to complete the funding request against the level of funding available came from the **High-Impact Africa 2** (83.8%) and the **High-Impact Asia** (82.1%) regions:

“Physical presence and attachment of GF mission team was excellent.”

“The Country team was very supportive, accommodative and patient with the multiple questions asked in parallel.”

Though still largely positive (73.0%), respondents from **Core** portfolio countries expressed that some of the challenges they faced related to impressions that not enough time or resources were available or allocated to complete the amount of work needed to develop a Global Fund funding request. Some respondents expressed sentiments of having to take on a heavy workload to complete the funding request. Others cited disappointment around their expectations for Country Team engagement and support, versus the amount these applicants felt they received. This was particularly the case among applicants in the **Southern and Eastern Africa**, the **Central Africa**, and the **Western Africa** regions. Respondents mentioned that such gaps resulted in an incomplete or unsatisfactory funding request:

“I expected the Country Team to do a detail country dialogue and training/sensitization on the funding application guidelines, materials and other processes.”

Through their written responses, applicants consistently demonstrated the value of the Global Fund Country Teams’ involvement in either transforming the funding request development experience into a positive one or into a challenging one. This is evident, for example, when the criticism above is contrasted against the praise shared by applicants from the **Eastern Europe and Central Asia** region below. This region showed an 87.5% positive response rate to the question regarding whether the time and effort necessary to develop the funding request was worth the available funding, with respondents consistently expressing appreciation for the Global Fund Secretariat’s support:

“We felt constant support from the team of GF.”

“[Community, Rights & Gender] TA played an important role in bringing the communities views in the frontline.”

“GF country team took part in majority of the events related to the development of country proposal.”

Turning to the components, the greatest proportion of positive responses about the trade-off between the work and time needed against the funding available was expressed by integrated component applicants, with 81.4% of **TB/HIV** applicants and 79.5% of **multicomponent** applicants responding positively. Despite listing challenges associated with the need for increased coordination, integrated component applicants commented that they benefited from Global Fund and other Partners’ support, that the funding requests were based on existing national strategies, and that integrated funding requests drove greater inclusivity and coordination among constituencies, national stakeholders, as well as national and international consultants:

“Support from the Global Fund and other partners was of crucial importance.”

“The process was more participatory and involved the various sectors of [Country] society with solid participation on the part of the Global Fund country team.”

“I agree to the extent that all technicians, employees, directors, coordinators of the Institutions of the Ministerial Sectors, NGOs, Associations involved in this process were engaged, as well as the documents, the relevant information for the preparation of the Proposal were available.”

Country Dialogue

As a whole, 93.2% of respondents rated their experience in country dialogue as positive overall. In fact, when asked about the best part of applying for Global Fund financing, the top response—representing 47.7% of respondents’ preferences—was participating in country dialogue.

Almost all constituencies responded 90% positively or higher about their overall experience participating in country dialogue. The greatest proportion of positive responses was among the **Country Coordinating Mechanism Secretariats** (100%), the **Private Sector** (95.8%) and **Government programs, ministries or agencies** (94.6%).

While 94.8% of all respondents stated that they felt free to express their views during country dialogue, all (100%) of 2020 survey participants belonging to a **CCM Secretariat**, the **Private Sector**, an **International NGO**, and **Academia** responded positively. This same trend of a 90% positive response rate or higher across constituency groups prevails in applicants’ responses about feeling prepared to participate and add value to the funding request development (95% overall).

Over 90% of all applicants responded positively when asked if those coordinating country dialogue actively reached out to civil society. While still largely positive (85.8%), applicants identifying with a

Key Population Organization, especially from **Core** and **High-Impact** portfolio countries, shared some areas for improvement in their written comments, relating to being sufficiently accommodated:

“Coordinators of [national program] and CCM don't reach out to us in time. Or even provide information to what's going on the team.”

“There were so many programs/sessions organized at the same time therefore affecting participation. CSOs were not adequately supported to participate in the process.”

Applicant satisfaction with their overall experience in country dialogue varies more across portfolio type than across constituency groups, with applicants from **Focused portfolio** countries responding the most positively (98.6%).

An astounding 100% of applicants from **Focused portfolio** countries responded positively when asked if they felt they could express their views during country dialogue. Survey respondents from Focused portfolio countries also responded more positively than applicants from other portfolio types when asked about whether they felt prepared to participate in and add value to the funding request development (97.8%) and whether those coordinating country dialogue actively reached out to civil society groups and key populations (95.7%).

Applicants from the Global Fund's **Eastern Europe and Central Asia** region were the most positive across several aspects of country dialogue, including in feeling free to express their views (100%), in feeling prepared to participate and add value to the funding request development (100%), and on beliefs around whether those coordinating country dialogue actively reached out to civil society groups and key populations (98.2%).

In their written responses, Focused portfolio country dialogue participants particularly from the **Eastern Europe and Central Asia** and the **Latin America and the Caribbean** regions expressed that the country dialogue was sufficiently participatory (a sentiment felt across constituency groups) and that they were thankful for sufficient engagement despite the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic:

“The country dialogue was built on the basis of trust and respect for each organization and proposals.”

“I think the Country Coordinating Mechanism played its role very well in bringing together all the institutions and civil society involved.”

Furthermore, respondents referred to using existing resources to pay for services—such as consultants and web-based platforms—to enhance participation. Health governance capacity may, therefore, also play a role (in allocating resources for these purposes and ensuring inclusivity):

“The key affected populations civil society [...] have been an active part in the develop [...] processes, being members of the operational [working groups] and CCM decision-making platforms [where] the application was developed, discussed and approved. The elaboration processes [...] have been transparent and can be accessed on the site [link].”

“Although in the context of COVID-19 it has been very difficult to participate in person, the technical team preparing the concept note has used all the technological tools available to ensure the greatest possible participation of all the sectors involved.”

In the High-Impact Africa 2 region, applicants belonging to the **Key Population Organization** constituency group expressed the lowest proportion of positive responses (77.8%) about country dialogue coordinators actively reaching out to civil society groups and key populations. In their written responses, these applicants identified a need for bolstering improved inclusiveness of key populations' voices to ensure that other voices are not disproportionately amplified:

“Many organizations and individuals invited to participate in the dialogue were not from [key population] led organizations.”

“In [Country], the MOH holds a very tight control of the process and does not provide adequate time information or preparation for other constituencies to participate, nor does it incorporate their points into the final product.”

While most applicants from the majority of the Global Fund regions responded positively when asked about their overall experience participating in country dialogue (consistently 90% positive or higher), applicants from the **Southern and Eastern Africa** region had the greatest proportion of negative responses (only 78.3% positive). Negative responses relating to overall country dialogue experience were driven by individuals identifying with the **Key Population Organization** and **Faith Based Organization** constituencies. In their comments, these applicants raised concerns regarding insufficient engagement of civil society and affected communities. They also highlighted concerns about translating their contributions into interventions included in the final funding request:

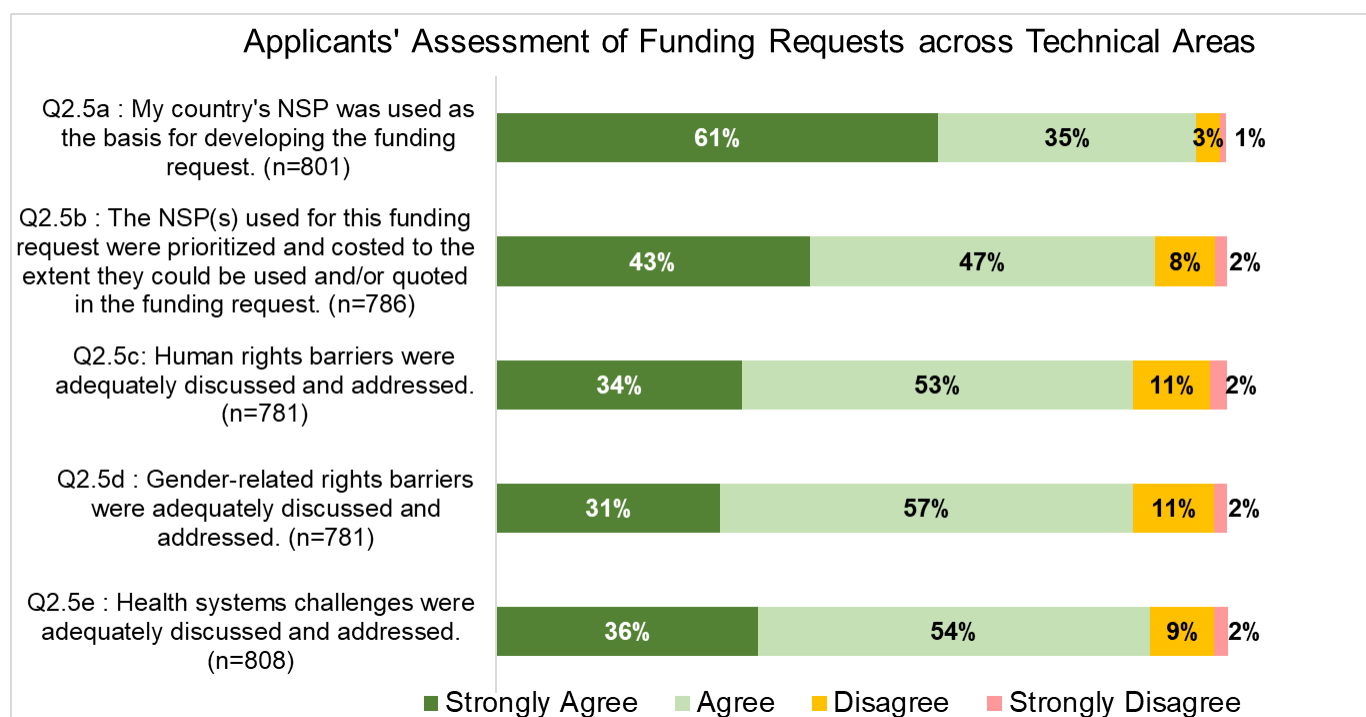
“Minimum or not involvement of Malaria Constituency.”

“The key populations and CSOs are consulted but they do not meaningfully engage and contribute. They are interested in receiving money to do advocacy, but they are ill-capacitated to craft interventions that can be put in the request.”

Perceptions of the Funding Request

Figure 2 below outlines applicants’ overall assessment of 2020 funding requests across five technical areas relating to the use of NSPs, gender, human rights, and health systems strengthening.

Figure 2. Applicant Assessment of FR across Technical & Thematic Areas, Percent



As a whole, applicants were exceedingly positive about the use of the country’s NSP as the basis for developing the funding request (95.9% positive). Additionally, applicants responded over 90% positively about the NSP being prioritized and costed to the extent that this information could be used and/or quoted in the funding request itself (90.2%).

Though still overwhelmingly positive, there was not 100% agreement among respondents who submitted a **Tailored for NSPs** application on whether the country's NSP was used as a basis for developing the funding request (97.2%). In their comments, those who expressed disagreement raised concerns relating to using drafts of the NSP (because the document itself was still being developed), while others mentioned that additional inputs had to be coordinated to fill gender- and human rights-related gaps:

“It took quite a bit of engagement by the technical assistance team to embed human rights related barriers into the main applications [...] but overall consensus was reached, and human rights barriers appreciated and addressed.”

“The funding application was developed at the same time as the national plans. The drafts of some plans were used in order to meet the Global Fund deadlines.”

In terms of NSP prioritization and costing, respondents from **Core portfolio** countries were less positive than those from Focused portfolios (87.2% versus 95.7%). In their remarks, Core portfolio applicants who submitted a **Full Review** application cited challenges relating to a lack of costing in the NSP or to the fact that the NSP was still in its development stages—and therefore missing some information. In some cases, applicants mentioned that budgeting information was not shared in a timely fashion, or that political barriers obstructed some stakeholders' access to the draft:

“Due to political instability in my country, it is very impossible to have access to NSP and if there is any in [Country] but we never refer to it or even have an idea if it is there.”

While applicants were overwhelmingly positive about their funding requests' NSP use, they generally noted more room for improvement when reflecting on whether health systems challenges (89.3%), gender (87.1%) and human rights (87.1%) were adequately discussed and addressed.

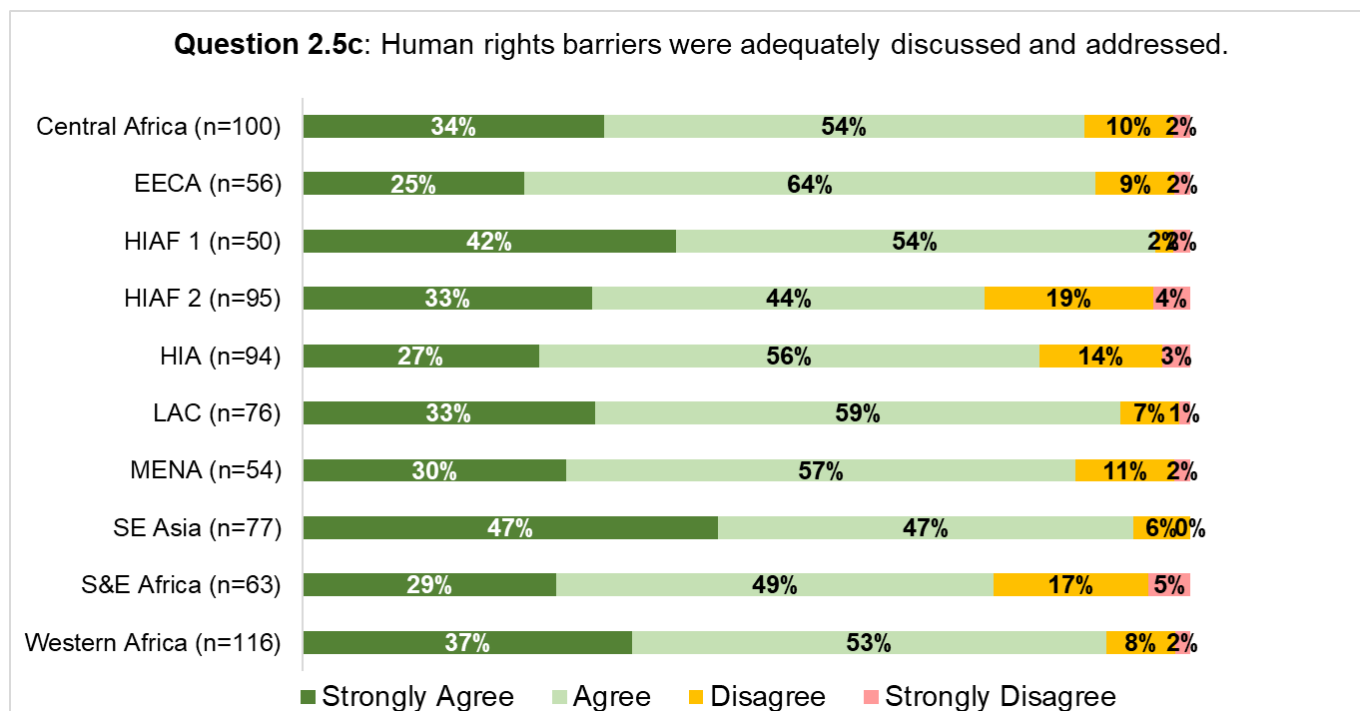
Though still largely positive, applicants belonging to the **Key Population Organization** constituency provided the lowest proportion of positive responses about human rights barriers being adequately discussed and addressed (76.4%) during the funding request development. This contrasts with a 95.7% positive response rate among applicants identifying as belonging to the CCM Secretariat. Most of the concerns from Key Population Organizations were raised by individuals responding from a **High-Impact portfolio** country. While High-Impact portfolio respondents were 83.7% positive on human rights, those belonging to a Key Population Organization were ten points less so (73.2%).

Across regions, portfolio types, application approaches and components, the challenges raised by individuals identifying with the **Key Population Organization** constituency include the impression that human rights were not seen as a government priority or that individuals from Key Population Organizations were not meaningfully engaged in drafting the funding requests. Some applicants expressed concern that, while Key Population Organizations' voices were heard during country dialogue, it was uncertain if this exchange translated into appropriate interventions in the funding requests themselves. Similar concerns included that desired interventions were either missing or not included in the allocation but rather in the Prioritized Above Allocation Request:

“As mentioned previously [key populations] representative was not involved in writing team even our priority were put at PAAR the country dialogue was not a process just a one day show.”

As seen in Figure 3 on the following page, applicant opinion on whether human rights barriers were adequately discussed and addressed varied widely by region.

Figure 3. Applicant Assessment of Human Rights Barriers Being Discussed & Addressed across Global Fund Regions, Percent (n=781)



Across the Global Fund regions, **High-Impact Africa 2** (76.8% positive) and **Southern and Eastern Africa** (78% positive) had the lowest proportion of positive responses regarding whether human rights barriers were adequately discussed and addressed. In addition to the above concerns common to individuals identifying with Key Population Organizations, respondents from the High-Impact Africa 2 region also cited challenges such as sub-optimal community involvement:

“CCM needs to reach out to each said community represented and have to make sure each community is represented well.”

In contrast, applicants were generally more positive in their responses to the question gauging whether gender barriers were adequately discussed, with an encouraging 83.3% positive response rate from individuals identifying with the **Key Population Organization** constituency.

Applicants from **Focused portfolio** countries were the most positive about their funding requests’ addressing of gender-related barriers (92.9% positive in contrast to 86.5% among High-Impact and 85.4% among Core portfolios). Respondents from Focused portfolio countries shared that they benefitted from the discussion and subsequent inclusion of gender-related barriers in the funding requests. Some respondents mentioned that, in certain cases, gender barriers were already included in NSPs. Other respondents expressed that the inclusion of gender-related barriers was facilitated by strong health sector governance in country:

“Human rights barriers, gender-related rights barriers and Health systems challenges were adequately discussed and addressed and proposed and agreed interventions for implementation that are part of NSP and FR.”

“Round tables were held among the populations and a consensus was reached that we have made good progress [...]”

Applicants from **Focused portfolio** countries also responded most positively when asked whether their funding requests adequately discussed and addressed health system challenges (97.9%). This is in harmony with the finding that applicants who submitted a **Tailored for Focused Portfolios**

funding request provided the greatest proportion of positive responses (98.2%) to the health systems question than any of the other application approaches. Of the Focused portfolio applicants, those from the **Latin America and Caribbean** region were the most positive about their funding requests' addressing of health systems challenges (98.7%).

Applicants from **High-Impact** (87.0%) and **Core** (87.8%) portfolio countries were still largely positive about whether their respective funding requests sufficiently addressed health systems challenges. Though, when compared to Focused portfolio respondents, applicants from Core and High-Impact portfolio countries were over ten percentage points less positive on average. This is in line with the finding that those who applied using the **Full Review** application had the lowest proportion of positive responses (86.6%) on the health systems challenges survey question.

In their written responses, applicants from **Core portfolio** countries highlighted challenges relating to health systems issues being discussed but ultimately not sufficiently addressed in the funding request (at times due to competing priorities or insufficient budget). Others remarked that concrete solutions to recurrent health system challenges were either not proposed or not fully explored:

“Health system weaknesses are a recurring problem and the proposed solutions are not in line with expectations.”

“Yes, Health systems challenges were adequately discussed, but were not fully addressed due budget limitation and high cost doing business.”

As was the case for human rights and gender, respondents from the **High-Impact Africa 2** region had the smallest proportion of positive responses (82.7%) when asked whether health systems challenges were adequately discussed and addressed.

Lastly, individuals associated with **HIV** funding requests were most positive about the degree to which health systems challenges were addressed (91.5% positive).

Questions for Tailored for NSPs Applicants

Collectively, applicants were overwhelmingly supportive of the **Tailored for NSPs** application approach, with 94.7% of respondents agreeing that they would recommend the application to other countries. In their written responses, some returning applicants stated that an advantage of the approach was good timing if the NSP was being developed at the same time as the funding request.

Nonetheless, some respondents did identify areas for improvement and further consideration. In their remarks, some applicants commented that the maturity of the NSP posed a challenge. Others mentioned that, in its development stage, a weaker NSP may require additional work—in addition to that needed to finalize the funding request. Finally, many applicants praised the Tailored for NSPs approach, stating that it resulted in a funding request that was responsive to the countries' needs:

“The approach of adapting to the national strategic plans provides an opportunity to update or fully develop in advance robust national strategic plans. [...] However, this approach required a lot more work for the national strategic plans which needed more in-depth work or underwent a major overhaul.”

When asked if they would recommend the Tailored for NSPs approach to other applicants, respondents from **Core** (97.1%) and **High-Impact** (93.3%) portfolios were exceedingly positive. In their remarks, applicants from Core portfolio countries mentioned that the Tailored for NSPs approach facilitated strategic discussion around funding request priorities and target setting. They mentioned that this application approach 'put people on the same page' and saved time by framing the discussion, keeping it focused on the NSP. Lastly, some shared that the approach contributes to achieving the NSP:

“When the application is based on the national strategic plans it works better because it’s made on a factual basis and everyone is on the same page so we are sure that the country will provide leadership to assume its responsibilities.”

“This type of funding request contributes to achievement of NSP.”

In reflecting on their experience using the approach, some respondents from **High-Impact portfolio** countries noted that while developing a robust and costed NSP may be a prolonged process, the resulting product is a benefit to the country. As an area for future improvement, some applicants encouraged enhancing the interventions in the Global Fund Modular Framework Handbook such that they may be adapted for this NSP-based application approach:

“Advantages: The existing strategic plans facilitate the development of the funding applications.

Disadvantages: Lack of consistency between the NSPs and the Global Fund’s modular framework. This gives the impression of developing a strategic plan to meet the needs of the Global Fund.”

Taking all inputs into account, some areas to continue monitoring moving forward include:

- Applicants identified NSP maturity as a success factor: Where the preceding NSP was strong, drafting the funding request while the successor NSP was in development was a positive experience. However, where the preceding NSP was weak, drafting the funding request and the NSP simultaneously resulted in more work and challenges.
- Applicants were concerned about the timing of the funding request against the NSP development cycle: As some NSPs were only in their draft form and, in certain political contexts, not widely available for review or not planned to be drafted until next year, poor timing between when the Global Fund funding cycle started and when the countries’ own NSP elapsed was cited as a challenge.

Perceptions of Applicant Materials and of Global Fund Resources

On the whole, applicants responded overwhelmingly positively to survey questions gauging their perceptions of the application materials—all receiving 90% positive responses or higher. The top three in terms of the proportion of positive responses were: the Modular Framework Handbook (98.2%), the Global Fund Website (97.8%), and the Application Forms (97.7%).

The application forms for the **Tailored for Focused Portfolios**, the **Tailored for Transition**, and the **Program Continuation** funding requests all received a 100% positive response from applicants. The **Tailored for NSPs** application form received a 97.6% positive response, and the **Full Review** form a 97.0% positive response.

Applicants who used the **Tailored for Transition** approach provided the greatest proportion of positive responses on the quality of the application instructions (100% positive), though respondents using the other four application approaches consistently responded 96% positively or higher.

It is worthwhile to note that 17.2% of respondents did not know that the Global Fund e-learning courses were available, while another 18.3% of applicants reported that they did not use this resource. Similarly, 15.0% of applicants did not know that the Global Fund had offered webinars and in-person meetings, while a further 13.3% of respondents shared that they did not use these resources despite knowing about them.

Barriers to Resources & Priorities for Improvement

Despite the on-going Covid-19 pandemic, an astounding 36.6% of applicants responded that they faced no barriers in applying for Global Fund financing in 2020.

Among those who did face barriers, however, the most common setback was the lack of connection to the Internet or a telephone, with 17.7% of applicants responding that this was a challenge. Following connectivity, the second most common barrier was that some applicants experienced challenges in finding resources: 11.2% of applicants reported that resources were hard to find while another 10.9% reported that they were unaware of the resources available.

Best Part of Applying

When asked about the best part of applying for funding, the greatest proportion of applicants indicated participating in the country dialogue (with 47.7% responding in favor).

When gauged on their satisfaction with the support provided by the Global Fund Country Teams during the country dialogue and funding request development process, the majority of applicants responded positively (91.4%). This was especially the case in the **High-Impact Africa 1** region, where 98.1% of applicants responded positively when asked if the Global Fund Country Team provided good support to the country dialogue and funding request development process. Similarly high levels of positive feedback were noted in the **Eastern Europe and Central Asia** region and the **High-Impact Asia** region (both at 94.6%).

The second most popular choice among applicants insofar as their favorite part of applying for funding was concerned was being a part of or supporting the CCM (with 41.4% of applicants marking this as one of their favorite parts of applying for funding).

Lastly, 37.3% of applicants stated that one of their favorite aspects of applying for Global Fund financing in 2020 was being able to access the information they needed.

Other Observations

When asked to prioritize areas of improvement for the Global Fund, the top priority identified by applicants was i) to provide clearer instructions and materials. Roughly tying for second place were to provide more ii) webinars and ii) Q&As and other opportunities to interact with and seek clarification from the Global Fund Secretariat. In third place, the Global Fund was asked to iii) make it easier to find needed resources on the Global Fund website. Providing a broader availability of topics as eLearnings on the Global Fund's iLearn platform was the least desired area of improvement.